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17 August 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR: Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

THROUGH   :   Director of Economic Research

SUBJECT   :   Communist Infrastructure

1.   You will recall that at the 18 June VSSG meeting
Dr. Kissinger asked General Cushman to provide what you later
called "a crisp analysis of the VCI" with particular references
to the following questions:

     a.   How should VCI be defined?

     b.   What sort of numbers of people are we
         talking about?

     c.   How has the VCI been affected by the
         events of the past year?

     d.   How should we rate the VCI's present
         effectiveness?

     e.   What is the VCI likely to look like a
         year from now given the present
         conditions? If there should be a
         cease-fire?

2.   The attached memorandum is in response to Dr.
Kissinger's request. It has gone through a number of redrafts
in an attempt to satisfy reviewers in OCI, ONE and the Clandestine
Services. We have done our best to take into account their
suggested changes.

3.   In terms of emphasis and organization, various parts
of the report are still probably not what each individual reviewer
would have preferred. In fact, some analysts in OER believe

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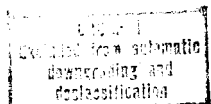
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that a few sections of the report could be much more forceably
stated. It is, however, about as balanced and reasonable an
analysis of the VCI that can be produced if we are to send
Dr. Kissinger a coordinated Agency appraisal.

4. The report has been formally coordinated within
the DDI and ONE. I have not, however, returned this draft
to VMO for the final sign-off because I expect that they
would ask for additional changes -- probably unimportant ones --
which would further delay satisfying our requirement to
Dr. Kissinger.

5. Specifically, [   ] tells me that VMO will
probably feel that not enough of the station's cable on the
subject has been put verbatum into the report. However, the
station's views are in the report, explicitly in some areas,
implicitly in others. In addition, VMO may still be somewhat
uncomfortable about the discussion of how good the VCI estimates
and data on eliminations are. As far as the numbers go, we are
convinced that they are much worse than we admit in the report
but our explanation of them is as clear as any proffered
alternative. There may be also some feeling that our case
studies ending the report may be too simple. That may be true,
but Dr. Kissinger is intimately familiar with the details of
these cases from the VSSG Cease Fire paper and doesn't need
a further discussion in this report.

6. I recommend that you handle the final sign-off with
VMO because I believe a little genteel clout is necessary at
this time to move the report out of the building. Otherwise,
the long delay in the production of this report could become
embarassing to the Agency.

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Chief, Indochina Division, OER

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Attachment:
  As noted above

Distribution:
  Original & 1 - SAVA (w/att)
           1 - D/OER
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OER/D/I [   ] (17 Aug 70)

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
August 1970

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Communist Infrastructure

Introduction

1. "Infrastructure" is a term the US began using
in the early 1960s to characterize the extensive non-
military portion of the Vietnamese Communist organi-
zation. Although its definition has never been fully
/resolved, it has usually been interpreted to include
enemy civilian personnel in South Vietnam engaged in
political, economic, propaganda, security, and other
activities.* Its membership has ranged from exec-
utives of the Current Affairs Committee at the na-
tional level to low-level security personnel who
serve in the hamlets. In territory under the con-
trol of the Communists, the infrastructure includes
the overt government; in areas that are contested or
under South Vietnamese control, it exists covertly
and has the primary goal of subverting the authority
and effectiveness of the South Vietnamese government.

2. The Phoenix/Phung Hoang organization -- the
Allied effort targeted against the Communist civil
cadre -- has defined the infrastructure as: "... the
political and administrative organization through
which the Vietnamese Communists seek control over the
people of the Republic of Vietnam. It embodies the
Communist Party control structure and the leadership
and administration of front organizations from
national through hamlet level. It includes individuals
who are members or probationary members of the Viet-
namese Communist Party and those non-Communist members
who perform an enemy cadre function." The definition
has been open to broad interpretation.

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* *The Appendix gives a short description of the
Communist non-military organization.*

*Note: This memorandum was produced solely by CIA.
It was prepared by the Office of Economic Research
and coordinated with the Office of Current Intel-
ligence, the Office of National Estimates, the
Director's Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs,
and the Clandestine Services.*

3. Some analysts have thought of the infra-
structure in terms of a broad definition which
would include all non-military personnel who serve
the Communists in any capacity. An estimate based
on such a definition would be considerably larger
than those discussed below. Others have thought
of the term as applying to the key, or "cadre,"
elements of the organization in order to exclude
persons of lesser importance, most of whom are not
Party members. In describing the extensiveness of
the organized insurgency base, the former concept
is in order. However, the Party or the narrower
key personnel element is the more appropriate con-
cept for most of our countersubversive activities.
The Phoenix definition attempts to approximate the
narrower definition.

Size

4. In addition to the conceptual problem, the
complexity of the Viet Cong non-military structure
and the widespread use of part-time workers have
made it extremely difficult to arrive at estimates
of the size of the infrastructure. Largely because
of these difficulties, no consistent meaningful
definition has been developed. US analysts and
organizations have tended to use several different
methodologies for estimating the infrastructure,
depending on their purposes. All of these defini-
tions have tended to exclude low-level and part-
time non-Party personnel. They have also largely
excluded the Communists' covert assets located in
South Vietnamese territory.

5. The current Phoenix estimate of Viet Cong
infrastructure (VCI) is 67,000. The primary pur-
pose of the Phoenix working definition is as a
management tool to "control" the quality of infra-
structure eliminations reporting. To this end,
Phoenix divides possible VCI into three catego-
ries -- A, B, and C - roughly according to their
usefulness to the Communists' cause. The estimate
excludes the C category. The estimate also ex-
cludes most of the subversive personnel operating
in territory controlled by the South Vietnamese
government.

6. The Phoenix estimate of 67,000 is largely
based on reporting from the districts. Unfortunately,

criteria for counting infrastructure personnel vary considerably by area. In one province in the Delta, for example, the local Phoenix estimator counts only security police. In others, there is considerable confusion as to what constitutes a "cadre." Furthermore, no province attempts to enumerate Viet Cong cadres who operate in territory controlled by the South Vietnamese government.

7. A CIA estimate of 80,000-100,000 was made in early 1968. This estimate, based on extrapolations from a limited number of captured documents, counted all full-time civilian workers at district level and above and large numbers of part-timers at the village and hamlet level. Like the Phoenix estimate, the CIA estimate did not attempt to enumerate Viet Cong cadres in GVN territory.

Trends in Strength

8. It is not possible to show numerically whether the strength of the infrastructure is going up or down. The main reason for the difficulty is that definitions and accounting procedures have changed so frequently that there is no compatible series of statistics over the past five years. Nor is there a relationship between overall infrastructure estimates and neutralization totals. A recent cable from the field pointed out that "even in those instances where the Special Police maintain sound basic files on the VCI, there is seldom any uniform arrangement for recording neutralizations, for cross-checking information with police in neighboring villages or districts, or for formally exchanging data with National Police headquarters in Saigon."

9. Phoenix neutralization statistics -- which show 19,500 VCI "killed, captured, or rallied" in 1969, as compared with 15,776 in 1968 -- are misleading for several reasons. The killed often include persons improperly identified. Many of the captured are frequently released after a short period of detention. Many listed as defectors are actually false ralliers sent by the Communists into Chieu Hoi centers in order to obtain legal GVN identification papers. On the other hand, the neutralization figures include many important Communist agents who are not by definition part of

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the infrastructure. Furthermore, large numbers of cadre who are killed or quit do not show up in the neutralization data. Nonetheless we believe that experienced analysts can use the neutralization data along with information from captured documents, prisoners, and defectors to gain insight into the magnitude and quality of personnel being lost by the Communists.

10. These materials provide an adequate body of evidence which makes it possible to draw some general conclusions about non-military strength trends during the past several years. According to captured documents and prisoner reports, some elements of the infrastructure underwent expansion prior to the 1968 Tet offensive but incurred heavy losses through exposure during and after Tet. The accelerated pacification and Phoenix programs, which went into high gear in late 1968, placed increasing pressure on the infrastructure. All factors considered, there is general agreement that the overall strength of the non-military portion of the VCI has declined in the past two or more years. Although most of the decline appears to have occurred at the village and hamlet echelons, there is also evidence of attrition at the district and province levels.

11. The most persuasive evidence comes from the Communists themselves in the form of captured documents, prisoners, and defector reports. A recent report, purportedly reflecting the views of COSVN, indicated that the Communists regard the Phoenix and the accelerated pacification programs as the most effective threat to the infrastructure the Allies have mounted so far. This same report, covering the period from Tet 1968 to September 1969, stated that great numbers of cadres had been killed and captured, and an especially large number had defected to the GVN.

12. The documents indicate the Communists are hurting worse in some areas than in others. They have been hit hardest in Saigon itself. From October 1968 to April 1969, six of Saigon's nine Precinct Party Committees were rolled up by the Special Police. Recently captured documents indicate that the Saigon operations of COSVN's Strategic Intelligence Office (SIO) -- which runs high-level

SECRET

penetrations in the South Vietnamese government --
were seriously curtailed last year. A document of
early 1970, for example, stated that a fifth of the
SIO's assets in Saigon "were arrested or had de-
fected" during 1969, that two-fifths were withdrawn
from the city because of compromise or improper
papers, and that only two-fifths continued to op-
erate as before. Among those arrested were at
least one member of the National Assembly, two
South Vietnamese Army majors who had served in the
National Police Special Branch, an ex-deputy police
chief of Hue, the ex-assistant head of the counter-
intelligence branch of ARVN's Military Security
Service (MSS), and a special assistant in the office
of President Thieu. The buffeting the Communist
structure has received in Saigon is apparently re-
flected in the decline in the rate of terrorist
incidents there. The incident rate in the city is
now the lowest it has been for several years. Evi-
dence of a similar decline in fortunes has been
received from Da Nang.

13. Although the government probably has done
better in cities than in the countryside in wrapping
up cadres, there is considerable evidence that the
infrastructure has been hurt in many rural areas.
Reports put out by Communist Security Sections in
several provinces have complained of GVN inroads.
For example, a security report of January 1970 from
Viet Cong Can Tho Province in the Delta stated that
the GVN had obtained "significant pacification re-
sults" in the province in the last three months of
1969 and that large numbers of cadres as well as
guerrillas had defected.

14. To help make up for VCI personnel losses,
Hanoi has continued to send civilian personnel to
South Vietnam, and the share of northerners in the
VCI has grown.* According to Phoenix reporting,

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* *There is a tendency to conclude that the use of
North Vietnamese in Communist infrastructure is a
sign of weakness because northerners cannot be as
effective in the south because of regional animos-
ities. There is evidence, however, that a large
North Vietnamese presence in the infrastructure
does not necessarily diminish the proselyting po-
tential of the local apparatus. Many northern
cadres perform important technical and political
functions which do not entail much public exposure.*

between 20% and 30% of cadre slots in Phu Yen are now filled by northerners. A recent high-level defector estimated early this year that as of late 1969 some 30,000 civilians had come south. Other information lends credence to his claim.

15. Local recruiting of Party members has clearly fallen off in most regions, yet reports indicate that it is still going on, even in areas under nominal government control. A report from III Corps claimed that in one pacified village, where every hamlet contained a GVN outpost, the Party recently recruited 55 Party members. The same report alleged that the Party has not lowered its membership standards; however, there is some evidence that standards may have slipped in the effort to staff depleted ranks.

16. In any case, the true strength of the enemy's infrastructure is less a matter of gross numbers than the quality of these personnel and the environment in which they operate. For example, of the estimated 20,000 military proselyting agents, only about 10%-20% are Party members. Of the total, about one-half are carried on the Communist roles as "sympathizers." These personnel will be greatly affected by trends in the overall situation.

17. The damage inflicted on the infrastructure in the past two years should not be exaggerated. Many developments counted as gains also have negative implications which should be weighed in a final assessment. Although several important penetration agents have been arrested in Saigon, their very presence demonstrates the effectiveness of the enemy's espionage and subversive systems. Furthermore, the gains of the pacification program remain highly perishable in many areas, as evidenced from recent experiences in Binh Dinh and Phu Yen Provinces, where the Communists appear to have reversed positive trends almost overnight. The pacification program may in fact contain seeds of its own weakness. As large numbers of people come under GVN control, many inevitably are vulnerable to the underground "legal" network that the Communists are attempting to enlarge.

Prospects for the Future

18. The Communists' ability to maintain or expand their structure depends on a number of factors, of which the overall course of the war is primary. When things go well for the Communists, replacements are easier to come by; when the opposite is true, they are harder to find. Whether the Viet Cong structure grows or contracts also depends on the enemy's strategy for fighting the war. When the Communists stress main force warfare, battlefield losses are high, and the non-military as well as the military organizations suffer for competent cadres. When the enemy assumes a low battlefield profile, as he has done for the past year and a half, the Communists have greater freedom to shift trusted personnel from the military to the political arenas of the conflict. Finally, the size and quality of the Communists' non-military structure depends in part on the level of civilian infiltration from North Vietnam. The future viability of the Communist Party structure in the south over the next year is discussed below in terms of a number of alternative assumptions.

Case I

19. *This case assumes that ceasefire occurs and both NVA and US troops regroup or withdraw. Both sides are free to use political action programs to improve their relative positions. During this period, pacification at least holds its own or makes some slow progress; economic and political conditions remain serious, but no worse than they are today.*

Discussion

20. Under these circumstances the Allies' greatest asset -- its offensive military force -- would be neutralized while the Communists would have their subversive structure intact. The relaxation of Allied military pressure would make it easier for the enemy to mount operations in GVN territory. It would also encourage large numbers of persons to return to their homes in Viet Cong territory where they would be prime targets for enemy proselyting efforts. Because the Communists would be able to transfer large numbers of cadres from their

- 7 -

military forces, the infrastructure would probably expand in size and quality. The Military Proselyting Section, Security Section, the Political Struggle Apparatus, and components of the Civilian Proselyting bureaucracy would almost certainly expand the most. In addition, there would be a tendency to send increasing numbers of cadres into GVN territory.

21. At the same time the various components of the Party structure operating in GVN territory would probably become more vulnerable as the exposure of Communist cadres increased. The extent to which the GVN could take advantage of the increased vulnerability is difficult to predict, however. Assuming the most optimistic of plausible assumptions -- as this case does -- there might be some further attrition of the structure a year after the ceasefire. Even so, the hard core would certainly remain intact and reasonably effective. As one moves away from the most optimistic set of assumptions, the prospects for the enemy's infrastructure greatly improve. Furthermore, there is the psychological effect of a US withdrawal from South Vietnam. Unless the GVN is able to maintain momentum and improve its image, the Communists' claim that they had forced the withdrawal of the foreign army might well be regarded as credible by the population. In this case, the Party structure would almost certainly be larger, more aggressive, and more highly motivated than it is today.

Case II

22. *This case assumes that there is no ceasefire but that US troops continue to withdraw. As under Case I, it is assumed that pacification at least holds its own or makes some slow progress; economic and political conditions remain serious, but no worse than they are today.*

Discussion

23. The principal difference between this Case and Case I -- which assumes a ceasefire -- is that the Allies would have the continued use of their strongest asset, their main forces. These would continue to be used to support pacification by providing a shield against enemy main forces.

24. The assumption that pacification at least holds its own or makes some slow progress is a critical one, not only in terms of the situation in general, but also in terms of the continued strength and viability of the infrastructure. In the VSSG paper, *The Situation In The Countryside*, 13 May 1970, it was concluded that the presence of the US maneuver units was a critical factor in the control situation and that as a result of US troop reductions over the next year, GVN control losses were almost certainly to take place in several heavily populated key provinces. Overall, we were not optimistic that the GVN could significantly increase its control over the countryside during 1970.

25. Two developments since these conclusions were reached seem significant. First, the Communists' local assets (Local Forces, Guerrillas, and infrastructure) have been successful in maintaining high levels of terrorism, harassment, and propaganda in many contested and nominally GVN-controlled areas. Evidence of a determined effort to maintain and augment these local assets with main force personnel continues to come in. This suggests that the Party structure may be holding its own.

26. The second development is the Cambodian situation -- both the Communist effort to topple the Lon Nol government and the Allied operation which has upset or impeded Communist plans. The situation in Cambodia not only has diverted substantial numbers of VC/NVA main force troops from operations in South Vietnam, but also has resulted in some unanticipated levies for financial, materiel, and personnel resources. Thus the immediate effect of the changed situation in Cambodia has been to reduce the capabilities of the Party structure at least in the short term. What effect Cambodia will have on the infrastructure over a longer period is impossible to predict. Much will depend on the ability of the GVN to overcome its fundamental shortcomings and on the viability of the Lon Nol government.

27. Another difference between this Case and Case I is the continued requirement by the Communists to maintain military forces in order to counter the Allied armies. The Communists would

SECRET

be unable to augment the infrastructure freely with
cadre from the military. Second, the threat posed
by Allied offensive activities against base areas
would make it more difficult for them to mount
political, subversive, and terrorist activity.
Finally, refugees -- and, for that matter, ARVN
soldiers -- would be less prone to return to their
homes in Viet Cong territory. All of these aspects
would make it difficult for the Communists to ex-
pand the infrastructure.

28. If one assumes that GVN security forces
improve and that no major dislocation occurs --
such as a coup, or a Communist takeover in Cam-
bodia -- one could imagine a situation in which
the Communist Party structure would continue to
find itself with many of the same problems it has
now: attrition of its cadres and a reluctance on
the part of the South Vietnamese people to cooperate
with it actively. Even under this assumption, it
is likely that the hard-core of the Communist infra-
structure, including a large part of the subversive
apparatus within the government, would continue to
operate, although not as effectively as before.

29. However, the continuing withdrawal of US
troops makes the Allied main forces a dwindling
asset. It is probable that in those areas where
US maneuver units leave, the infrastructure will
be able either to maintain the status quo or to
improve its prospects. These prospects would be
heightened if US withdrawals were accompanied by
political turmoil in South Vietnam, a collapse of
the present regime in Cambodia, or a worsening of
South Vietnamese economic problems.

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APPENDIX

Communist Non-Military Organization

In running the Communist organization, the Hanoi Politburo sees Vietnam as a single country, the area south of the 17th Parallel being as much its responsibility as the Vietnamese provinces north of the DMZ. However, because of the difficulty in exercising its authority over the southern reaches of South Vietnam, Hanoi in late 1960 created an advance headquarters which US analysts call the "Central Office of South Vietnam" (COSVN).* COSVN directly controls operations in the southern half of South Vietnam (that is, everything south of the southern border of VC Region V). Hanoi maintains more direct control of operations in the northern half of the country. Whether under the direct control of Hanoi or of COSVN, the Communist structure is generally the same both in its vertical and horizontal organization.

There are six echelons in the Communists' organizational structure: (1) national, (2) region, (3) province/subregion, (4) district/city, (5) village, and (6) hamlet. At each echelon of command, there is a Viet Cong structure responsible for the performance of all the functions of government, ranging from public health to internal security. At district level and above, the agencies are formal, highly structured, and manned by full-time personnel. In the villages and hamlets, the organization is relatively loose, is staffed mostly by part-timers, and does not always include all components.

Within the structure, orders are transmitted from upper to lower echelons through two channels. The first is the Party channel which starts at the Politburo in Hanoi and extends through the Party Current Affairs Committees of the lower echelons. A directive decreeing a major policy change would

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* *"Central Office of South Vietnam" is a mistranslation of a Vietnamese phrase meaning "Central Office of the Southern Area."*

move through the Party channel. The second command channel is administrative. Each specialized bureaucracy uses its own administrative channel to give instructions to and exert control over its subordinates. An example of an administrative order would be a police directive traversing the security apparatus chain of command from the Ministry of Public Security in Hanoi to regional or provincial security sections.

At each echelon, the Communist organization consists of a number of agencies. In Hanoi, they are called Ministries and Departments. At COSVN and other echelons in the south, they are most often called "Sections." A typical Communist organization at the province level consists of the following elements (see the chart):

   a.   The Current Affairs Committee, which directs the province's day-to-day activities. It is made up of about half a dozen senior cadres, including the Party Secretary, the head of the Security Section, and the chief of the echelon's military forces.

   b.   The Administrative Office, which handles the Current Affairs Committee's correspondence.

   c.   The Organization Section, which is the Party personnel office.

   d.   The Finance and Economy Section, which controls the Viet Cong economy, collects taxes, and deals with other financial matters.

   e.   The Forward Supply Council, which oversees the recruitment and deployment of civilian laborers and related logistic problems within the province.

   f.   The Civil Health Section, which supervises civilian clinics and health services.

g.   The Political Struggle Section,
which tries to foment disorders in
territory controlled by the South
Vietnamese government.*

h.   The Propaganda and Training
Section, which controls the school
system, publishes newspapers and
pamphlets, and runs propaganda cam-
paigns.

i.   The Security Section, which runs
the Viet Cong police and controls a
counter-intelligence espionage net-
work within South Vietnamese security
and intelligence organs.

j.   The Military Proselyting Section,
which runs the subversive effort
against South Vietnamese military and
security organizations.

k.   The Civilian Proselyting bureauc-
racy, which tries to persuade South
Vietnamese citizens to support the
Viet Cong cause. It does so through
such organizations as the National
Liberation Front and the Alliance of
National, Democratic, and Peace Forces.

All but three of the above components operate in
both Viet Cong and GVN territory. The exceptions
are the Current Affairs Committee, its Administra-
tive Office, and the Organization Section. These
components almost invariably stay in territory under
Viet Cong control. The headquarters elements of the
other components are also stationed in Viet Cong
territory.

Obviously, some components of the infrastructure
are more threatening to the South Vietnamese

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*   Not all areas have formal Political Struggle Sec-
tions. In areas where they do not exist, their
functions are performed by other elements. They are
more common in the northern half of the country than
in the south.

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government than others. Of those listed above, the
most dangerous are the Security Section,* which
contains some of the Viet Cong's most efficient and
ruthless cadres, and the Military Proselyting Sec-
tion, which has an extensive agent network within
the South Vietnamese armed forces and security
agencies.

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* *The Security Section provides a typical example
of the problems in defining the VCI. The Security
Sections maintain quasi-military armed Security units
which could reasonably be counted as part of the
enemy combat forces.*

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